



## EBT WIRELESS PROJECT September 09 Newsletter



DHS

### From the Editor – Jan Walters

Total Transactions	EBT Transactions	Total Sales on Wireless
<b>2008 Total: 27,701</b>	<b>4257 (15.4% of total)</b>	<b>\$724,703</b>
<b>2009 Totals:</b>		
January 09 265	17 (6.4%)	\$14,678
February 291	42 (14.4%)	\$23,494
March 382	39 (10.2%)	\$26,075
April 579	44 (7.6%)	\$28,492
May 4134	448 (10.8%)	\$145,541
June 3897	715 (18.3%)	\$92,723
July 4299	1217 (28.3%)	\$74,445
August 5168	1541 (29.8%)	\$89,825

#### August Facts:

- The number of EBT transactions and EBT sales for August are higher than any other month since the Project began in 2005!
- EBT sales for August 09 were \$14,463.97 compared to \$10,105.96 for August 08. This is an increase of 43%
- EBT transactions for August 09 were 1541 compared to 1083 in August 08. This is an increase of 42%
- Overall, total sales for August 09 were \$89,825, which is 33% higher than August 08
- Total transactions of 5168 are 18.5% higher than August 08
- The average transaction amount for August 09 was \$17.38 compared to \$15.51 a year ago
- 42 farmers had more EBT sales than commercial sales

Year to date sales for 2009 are \$495,287 compared to \$384,762 from a year ago. This is an increase of 28.7%. **Year to date EBT sales are \$39,118 compared to \$24,186 from a year ago. This is an increase of 62%.**

In August 2009, there were 143,438 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$40 million in benefits were issued in August to these families.

#### Here are other interesting facts regarding August sales:

There were 148 farmers/producers who were active during July. There were 113 of you who had EBT sales. The farmers who had 20 or more EBT transactions in August were:

- R & R Farm
- Westrum Produce
- Barb's Garden & Pantry
- Rinehart Family Farm

- Hala's Honey
- Tatonka Farm
- Grubby's Kettle Korn
- Hoffman Produce
- DeMoss Pumpkin Farm
- Havel Pork
- Circle M
- Stillwater Greenhouse
- Scavo's Market
- Country Market
- Log Cabin
- Nostalgia Farms
- Storybook Orchard
- Farmer's Ken Produce
- Circle W Produce
- Iowa Orchard
- Melon Shed

**For the second consecutive month, congratulations to Tammy Donovan/Country Market for having the highest number of EBT transactions (over 200) and the greatest amount of EBT sales. Country Market is located in the Sioux City area. Great job!**

## Interesting Facts

- A farmer from the Ames area reported that they had one EBT purchase for \$295. Intrigued, I had to ask what the woman purchased. Items purchased included a large jug of honey, apples, and lots and lots of winter squash. She planned on keeping the squash and using it over the winter months. The woman indicated that she has six children. This is a great example of how important you and farmers markets are for the Food Assistance families. It shows that that people do plan ahead and make smart choices with their food benefits.
- Historically, August has been the highest month for EBT sales
- Historically, October has been the highest month for all sales

## Shutting Down for the Winter 2009/2010

By now, most of you have received a phone call from us or a seasonal closure letter in the mail. We are closing approximately ninety accounts for the winter months. It will be extremely important to return the signed closure forms to us. We must have a signed closure letter to mail to TMS to close down your account. If the closure form is not timely returned to us, you may not receive monthly reimbursement from DHS.

If you have any questions about closing your account for the winter, contact Tracy or Jan. Remember, if your situation changes, let us know so we can discuss it with you.

## New Instructions for Technical Assistance

DHS staff have assisted many of you over the past five years. As the Wireless Project has expanded and become a national model, DHS staff are fielding lots of questions and inquiries from other states, market managers and interested farmers. With staffing shortages and additional work on other projects, we needed to come up with an alternative solution to timely address your concerns and questions.

Tracy and Jan had a lengthy conversation with Kim Lyons of Merchant Source and Total Merchant Services (TMS) and have come up with the following solution:

- When you are experiencing an issue with your wireless machines, **the first step is to call TMS at 1-888-848-6825**. When prompted, you need to push 1. When prompted again, push 1 again to be connected with Tech Support. The first thing that you will need is your Merchant ID number. That number should be on the sticker on the side of your machine or on your billing statement. **If for some reason the person you are talking to you can't fix the problem, please ask to speak to Ray Rockwell**. Tracy has worked extensively for the past year with Ray and he knows our program very well and has worked hard to train the TMS tech support staff to better help Iowa farmers with any issue.
- If TMS does not help you fix the problem, then be sure to call Tracy or Jan right away.
- **If TMS tells you that your device needs to be replaced, call Tracy or Jan right away. There may be a replacement fee for the device. DHS wants the fee directly billed to us versus debited from your checking account.**

It is extremely important that you call TMS as soon as you realize that you are having a problem with your wireless machine. Your wireless machines need to be in working order at the Farmers Markets so that the Food Assistance population can purchase fresh, healthy food items from you.

## Hiawatha Market Visit

Jan visited the Hiawatha Market on Labor Day weekend. This is one of the few markets open on Sunday. There was a large crowd shopping at the market the afternoon that we visited. The participating farmers there that day were H & P Meats, Musil Gardens and Circle W. All the vendors had their signs out and ready to go.



Joan & Ray Musil/Musil Gardens



## Johnston Market Visit

Jan visited the Johnston Market on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The vendors had a wide variety of items for sale. This Tuesday afternoon market had a steady flow of customers. The two participating vendors at this market were Berry Patch/Judy Henry and Storybook Orchard/Chaouki Younes.



Berry Patch/Judy Henry



Storybook Orchard/Chaouki Younes

## Important: Check New Equipment Immediately

When TMS directly mails you a new device, we want you to check the power cord, download cord, and wireless device immediately to make sure everything works. We had a farmer receive a new device in the mail. The device worked and everything appeared fine. A week later, the farmer tried to charge his battery. He thought the charge worked. He quickly realized the battery was not charged. He brought the machine and cords to us. We discovered that the charge cord was defective. TMS gave us two choices, 1) return the entire machine and all the cords to them for a replacement 2) pay for the cost of a new power cord.

Neither choice was ideal. If we returned the machine to TMS, the farmer would have been without a device for about a week. We didn't want to pay for a power cord. Luckily, we came up with a work around for this one case. DHS staff will be checking the cords on machines that we handle. A new charger cord is approximately \$50.00. We want TMS to cover these costs and replace the equipment rather than DHS paying for the cost of the cords.

## Duplicate Transactions

We have been receiving several phone calls from the farmers concerning duplicate transactions. When you run a transaction on your wireless machine and you are unsure whether it went or not here are a couple of things that you need to do.

- **First** look at the receipt and see if the transaction says APP or approved.
- If you are still unsure, then please **STOP** and batch out your wireless machine.
- If the transaction is **not** on your batch report then you will need to re-run the transaction.

We have seen several examples of farmers just re-running the transactions and therefore charging the customers twice. In order to fix the double charge, please call TMS at 1-888-848-6825, option 1, option 5, option 0 and they will work with you to reverse the extra charge.

## Rush Fees for Farmers Using First National of Omaha

We have a few farmers using Verifone VX 610 equipment that is processed by the First National Bank of Omaha (Lorrie Wacker is the contact person). First National charges a \$25 rush fee if they overnight equipment or supplies to the farmer. The other companies that we work with provide 'free' overnight services. **If you have a wireless device that has transactions processed by First National, DHS will not reimburse you for any 'rush' delivery fees.** If you need supplies, etc, contact Tracy or Jan first.

## Upcoming Events

**13<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Food Security Coalition Conference** – October 10-13, 2009 at the Des Moines Convention Center. Their website is [www.communityfoodconference.org](http://www.communityfoodconference.org) . We've been selected to present information about the EBT Wireless Project. Many of these participants will be visiting the Downtown Des Moines farmers market on Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>. **Please make sure you have your signs and wireless device at the market. Attendees from other states are looking at how wireless technology operates at the market and for individual farmers.**

**Farm Bureau Annual Conference** – Des Moines Convention Center December 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. More information coming.

**Des Moines Downtown Winter Season Markets** – Des Moines is holding their indoor/outdoor markets at Capital Square/Nollen Plaza; the same as previous years. The dates are November 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>, and Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>. The Friday lunch market will be from 11AM-2PM. For more information contact: Kelly Foss (515-286-4928) or Molly Kotval (286-4911) if you're interested in selling at this market.

## Customer Survey Results for 2009

The customer survey response so far is phenomenal! Just a reminder, please put the cards in the sack of any customer, **especially** those who use a plastic card for payment. We've had many responses from customers who paid with cash. The comments are interesting, but we really want feedback from those who are using plastic (EBT, debit or credit). If you need more cards, contact Tracy. Here are the results so far:

- Why do you like to shop at farmers markets? (Top reasons in descending order)
  - Good/fresh food (109)
  - Fresh Produce (82)
  - Buy locally grown/made items (58)
  - Support local farmers (37)
  - It's Fun/relaxed atmosphere/music (19)
- How often do you shop at farmers markets?
  - Every week – 55%
  - Every 2 weeks – 13%
  - Once or twice a month – 10%
  - More than once a week – 8%
  - As much as I can – 3%
  - 3 out of 4 weeks – 3%
  - Not often - 3%
  - Other - 5%

- What markets do you shop at? (Top 5 responses thus far)
  - Davenport (Northpark & Freight House) – 67
  - Iowa City - 39
  - Des Moines (Downtown, Drake, Valley Junction) - 31
  - Cedar Rapids – 21
  - Burlington - 15
- What did you buy today at the market? (Top 7 in descending order)
  - Fresh produce - 201
  - Baked goods – 136
  - Honey/Jam & jelly – 33
  - Vegetable plants/fruit bushes/trees - 30
  - Meat – 26
  - Eggs - 9
- What would you like to buy but can't find at the market? (in descending order)
  - More Fruit – 9
  - Eggs - 7
  - More meat vendors - 4
  - Parsnips – 3
  - Cheese - 3
  - Lots of other things, such as (goat milk, fresh juice, shrimp, eggplant, arts & crafts, etc)
- If a year round market was in your area, would you shop at it during the winter months?  
(Apparently, the question should have specified 'an indoor' year round market. Many customers are assuming that its outside and no produce will be available.)
  - Yes – 76.6%
  - No – 13.2%
  - No answer – 6.6%
  - Depends or already have indoor year-round market – 3.6%
- What services could the market offer or provide that would make you shop there more often? (in descending order)
  - Restrooms - 54
  - Hand washing stations -43
  - Canning/freezing classes - 27
  - Chairs/sitting areas to relax & eat goodies – 7
  - Others (incl. shade, more variety, music, cooking demos, garbage cans, etc) - 20
- How did you pay for your items today?
  - Cash –61.8%
  - Credit – 14.3%
  - Debit – 11.5%
  - EBT – 10.8%
  - Other (senior checks/checks) – 1.6%

Additional comments from customers:

- Davenport - I think it's wonderful that these markets allow pets! Everyone is very nice & they help customers plus each other
- Davenport - The market should have just local produce, 50 mile radius of vendors. No



selling of foods otherwise. Keep them in a separate area: Ex jewelry, trinkets.

- Harlan - thank you
- Cedar Rapids/IA City - Keep doing whatever it is. Keep it local, keep it green
- Davenport - The variety is great & the samples helped me to decide to purchase new veggies.
- DM - I love the farmers market!
- Mt. Vernon - Prefer Iowa products or USA products
- IA City - Great selection & prices
- IA City - Love it!
- Don't encumber the vendors with credit, EBT and debit card requirements
- Having credit available is good. Ran out of cash & was able to buy more!

## Cost of Wireless Equipment

Just a reminder: If you lose the wireless device, there is a \$750 replacement cost. Total Merchant Services will deduct this amount from your checking account. If the device is stolen, be sure to contact your insurance agent to see if a claim can be filed. Insurance may pay for all or part of the replacement costs.

## Helpful Hints!

We have received a few calls from farmers indicating that their new wireless machine keeps shutting off by itself. Here is how to turn off the batter saver:

- Get to Credit Sale page
- Hit the red colored 'Menu cancel' key
- The machine may tell you to enter Password. Remember; the password is always the current date mm/dd/yyyy or 06192009, Hit enter after entering the date
- You will now see the 'Menu Screen'. Press '3' Merchant Options
- Now press '5' for Battery Saver
- Now press '1' to turn the Battery Saver off.
- The machine will now ask 'Are you sure? Hit enter for Yes.
- Now you're done! The machine will stay on until you shut it off.  
Hit Menu Cancel to return to the Credit Sale screen.

Loading Paper – We have also received a few calls from farmers stating that the receipts aren't printing. Please check to see how you have loaded the paper. The paper must always feed up from the bottom. Make sure the plastic cover over the paper is firmly closed. If you have further problems with this, call TMS (the 888 number is on the side of your machine.)

## Important Information on Turning Off Your Machine!

If you decide to turn off your wireless machines, it is extremely important that you contact Tracy first, not Total Merchant Services (TMS). The EBT Wireless Program is a special program and therefore the closure forms **HAVE** to come through us. If you contact TMS directly, you may incur the \$295 early termination fee. We have had two farmers go directly to TMS and one of the farmers even sent the State of Iowa owned equipment back to TMS and it cannot be retrieved. The same farmer also threw away our signs. Because of these actions, the farmer has been billed for the loss State of Iowa equipment. If you have any questions on this issue, please contact Tracy.

## Reminders:

1. Since we have so many new farmers, remember that you cannot ring up a sale for another vendor. You could lose your Food Stamp certification and be terminated from the Wireless Project.
2. Since you are paying for the commercial transaction fees, be sure to keep track of what you are paying so you can use those expenses as a tax deduction.
3. You cannot set a minimum purchase amount. If an EBT household wishes to purchase \$.50 in onions, you do need to process the transaction. Same for any debit or credit transaction.
4. If your machine quits working, be sure to call Jan or Tracy right away! Or if need help during the weekend, you can call the 888 phone number on the side of your machine.
5. Let us know if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.
6. The second battery that we provide to you was purchased by DHS. If you ever need to return your wireless machine, be sure to keep one battery, carrying case and signs.
7. **Charge your batteries before market.** You should always have a charged battery, ready to go for market. If a battery is not holding a charge, contact Tracy for a replacement.
10. Please make sure to keep the original box that your machine came in as it contains the Sim card, which is needed to identify your machine if you have to call TMS.

## Help Desk

**We are here to help you!**

**When you have questions about:**

- **Participating in the Wireless project or reimbursement questions? Call Tracy Penick at 515-281-5545 or Jan Walters at 515-281-3588.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call FNS at 515-284-4035.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Char Hansen at 515-281-6820.**